



# The Cleveland Museum of Art

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Contact: Denise Horstman  
216/421-7340, ext. 262

## **MARY CASSATT AND BERTHE MORISOT** November 7, 1993 - January 2, 1994

In celebration of the centennial of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition--the first world's fair to officially recognize women's achievements--The Cleveland Museum of Art will present an exhibition of paintings, prints, and drawings from its permanent collection, **Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot**. The exhibition opens November 7, 1993; that same day, the Museum will host the Cleveland Women's Orchestra for an historic concert of music composed by women for the Exposition. The exhibition will remain on view through January 2, 1994.

In an age marked by formidable obstacles to women's professional success, Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot emerged among the most innovative artists of their time. Both overcame personal and institutional pressures--the French government-sponsored art school (Ecole des Beaux-Arts) did not admit women until 1897, so they studied privately. **Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot** highlights their artistic achievements against the backdrop of the time in which they lived.

Cassatt (1844-1926) excelled in various media, making her most intimate and poignant contributions in printmaking. The exhibition includes Cassatt's rare, acclaimed print *The Lamp*, in color drypoint, softground etching, and aquatint, and about twenty other works by her. Morisot (1841-95), who was preoccupied with studying light and painting outdoors, participated in all but one of the Impressionists' exhibitions. The four works by Morisot in the show include *The Reader*, a picture of Morisot's sister, which was one of the four paintings the artist selected to represent her at the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874.

The show draws attention to the mutually supportive professional relationships between Cassatt and Edgar Degas, who also pushed the boundaries of print techniques, and Morisot and her brother-in-law, Edouard Manet; it includes portraits of the women by these colleagues.

It is fitting the Museum commemorate the 1893 Exposition: one of the Museum's founders, J.H. Wade II, purchased and gave to the Museum some 1,000 pieces of lace exhibited there. Mary Cassatt was among the artists who painted murals--now lost--inside the Exposition's "Woman's Building." **Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot** was organized by C. Griffith Mann, NEA Intern in the department of education and public programs, assisted by William H. Robinson, assistant curator of modern art.

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## Background on the World's Columbian Exposition

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the World's Columbian Exposition, also known as the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. A significant world's fair on several counts, it was the most elaborate and extensive public exhibition produced by the United States in the 19th century. It was also the *first* world's fair to give official recognition to women's achievements.

Interest in having a world's fair to honor the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the New World occasioned much debate across the nation, in newspapers, in Congress, and in cities competing for the fair. On April 28, 1890, President Benjamin Harrison signed the bill authorizing an international exposition to take place in Chicago during the spring and summer of 1893 (rather than 1892).

There was a great effort to make this world's fair bigger, better, and grander than any before it. Main exhibition halls included the Machinery Hall, the Electricity Building, nineteen structures erected by foreign nations, and thirty built by U.S., state, and territory governments. Eighty-six foreign nations, colonies, and principalities participated, and the World's Congress Auxiliary provided a comprehensive series of scholarly conferences to complement the fair. Many people felt that America's variety of peoples should be featured as its strength and that this fair should reflect the country's position as a world leader. P.T. Barnum expressed the sentiments, advising: "include as many examples of the diversity of human life and culture so as to break down old myths and prejudices."

In keeping with these ideas, women were making efforts to be *officially* included. Such efforts had been made for previous world's fairs but no real participation achieved. In 1889, when Susan B. Anthony learned that once again there were plans for a great world's fair in America, she determined that, this time, women's participation would be officially sanctioned and supported by the national government. To this end, she coordinated a major lobbying effort among wives and daughters of public officials. When the act creating the world's fair was finally passed, it created a National Commission (of men) and authorized them to appoint a number of women to a Board of Lady Managers; Mrs. Potter H. Palmer served as president, and Miss Phoebe Couzens, as secretary. Subsequently, the National Commission appointed to the Board of Lady Managers 115 women representing the various states and territories. Increased attention was focused, both in the United States and abroad, on the role women would play in the Columbian Exposition. Influential American and European women and women's organizations were contacted and asked to send exhibits demonstrating women's accomplishments in all areas.

One of the Board's main achievements was the Woman's Building. In February, 1891, the fair's Board of Architects agreed the Woman's Building should be designed by a woman; the winner among twelve designs submitted was by Sophia G. Hayden of Boston, who had studied at MIT. It was a magnificent structure--199 x 388 feet--of Italian Renaissance design, with interior murals painted by women artists. Dedicated in October 1892 before an audience of over 100,000, it exhibited women's achievements in many fields including science, industry, and the arts.

The Women's Musical Congress was held during the Columbian Exposition and drew the largest number of women musicians ever assembled. Many musical works were written for the fair and leading women musicians presented many recitals, performances, and lectures.